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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [AJ](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: VIEW FROM BAKU - "IRAN CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS"

REF: A. A) BAKU 91  
[1](#)B. B) BAKU 30  
[1](#)C. C) 2009 BAKU 972  
[1](#)D. AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Rob Garverick, Political/Economic Counselor,  
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Over the last ten days Baku Iran watcher has met with over a dozen Iranian contacts to obtain their insights and expectations on the upcoming 22 Bahman/February 11 opposition demonstrations in Iran. Contacts polled included Iranian bankers, wealthy businessmen, NGO figures, journalists, management consultants, and students. The polled group includes several professedly "apolitical" interlocutors and two opposition skeptics, as well as several opposition supporters and activists.

#### Massive Tehran Protest Demonstrations Expected

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[1](#)2. (C) Most Baku Iran watcher contacts (including several Iran-based interviewees) predict massive demonstrations in Tehran, and significant protests in Tabriz, Mashad, Isfahan, and some smaller cities. Many asserted that pre-demonstration planning, propaganda, and organizational activities by opposition supporters (especially students) is far more noticeable and fractionalized compared to previous demonstrations. Several commentators claimed that while pro-Moussavi and pro-Karroubi websites are still important sources of information and encouragement, they are no longer the only or even main reference points for determined oppositionists. "Neither Moussavi nor Karroubi can stop this (opposition protests) now," one social activist contended.

#### Opposition Turnout Efforts

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[1](#)3. (C) A businessman pointed out that for the first time the reformist fraction in the Majlis, the reformist-affiliated Islamic Iran Participation Front, and similar groups have issued calls for large turnouts clearly aimed at protesters. Two student sources and a journalist related that small group of university students and others have traveled from Tehran to their hometowns to help promote broader protest turnouts and coordination. While a businessman from Isfahan claimed that opposition organizations are increasingly perceptible in his city, other interlocutors expressed skepticism that such activities will have a measurable impact in the short run. A Tehran University lecturer stressed that opposition organization and planning in urban areas is spreading. He conceded a lack of commensurate rural protest, but dismissed this as unimportant, since "radical change comes from cities,

not villages." Rural populations were also not a factor in the overthrow of the Shah, he stated.

#### Teams Put Up Posters, Graffiti

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¶4. (C) A Tehran student who has participated in all the post-presidential election protests claimed that a former drop-off in his friends willingness to participate in demonstrations was reversed in the Ashura protests, and is picking up steam. "Almost all of them will turnout on 22 Bahman," he said. He said that he is part of a four-man group that regularly travels on two motorcycles looking for places to paint anti-regime graffiti or put up posters: "two of us act as lookouts, while the others draw the graffiti." He described this as a common model for young people putting up slogans. The student called himself a "pacifist," favoring non-violent protest, but claimed that many people are talking about bringing clubs and knives with them "to defend against the Basij." A Mashad resident also expressed fear of 22 Bahman violence, but noted that popular anti-regime clerics there are promoting non-violence.

#### Father Knows Best?

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¶5. (C) The same student related that a few days before Ashura he and a friend were caught by police sending protest emails over the internet from a closed office. He said that he police said that they didn't want to arrest them, but "needed to eat." After receiving a bribe delivered by his sister, the police let them go, without any questions about my identity or where I live." The student added that after this incident his father complained that "I can't afford your revolution."

#### Khameini "Not As Powerful As You Think"

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¶6. (C) A Tehran-based business consultant who is friendly with Supreme Leader Khameini's family, and provides business advice to several senior regime figures, told Iran watcher bluntly that Khameini is "not as powerful as you guys think." According to this source, Khameini is subject to severe bouts of depression, and takes morphine (not opium) regularly. He claimed that Khameini is "unable to function half the time," and relies totally on his advisors. Khameini's son Mojtaba he dismissed as "a complete idiot" who is easily manipulated and has no future after Khameini leaves the scene (see septel).

¶7. (C) Though stressing that he is not an opponent of the Islamic system, he warned that the Revolutionary Guard-based faction which "stole the election," and is now seeking total control is "extremely dangerous to both us and you." He repeatedly characterized this group as "a criminal cult," motivated by its fanaticism, ignorance, and the monetary self-interest of its members. He added that the group is intent on exporting revolution. According to source, both Ahmedinejad and Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi are affiliates rather than "leaders" of this group, and neither will likely end up with significant power if the group successfully consolidates control over the state and its economy (see reftel).

#### "Iran Can't Go On Like This"

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¶8. (C) The consultant placed the 22 Bahman protests within this context as part of an inner-regime coalition's effort to split Khameini from Ahmedinejad, and retake power from the "anti-democratic cult." (Note: other Iranian sources expressed doubt that protesters will accept maintenance of Khameini in office. "(Khameini) must go whatever Karroubi says, and whether or not he breaks with Ahmedinejad," a student asserted. End Note).

19. (C) The consultant claimed that extra-judicial murders undertaken by cult-related elements are being stepped up, and placed the recent bombing death of an Iranian physicist and the alleged killing of non-cult generals directly in this context. He claimed that Iran's economy is approaching a crisis, and predicted that Iran is likely on the road to greater violence and unrest. While not certain of the ultimate outcome, he opined that 22 Bahman may well move Iran closer to a political endgame. He explicitly rejected suggestions that Iran can continue indefinitely going through periods of mass protest followed by crackdowns. He stressed that events are moving forward - instability, fractionalism, and factionalism within the country are increasing, and "Iran simply cannot go on like this."

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